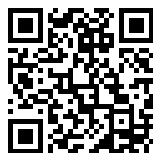

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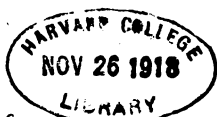
**THE STORY
OF ST. PATRICK'S PURGATORY**

The Story of St. Patrick's Purgatory

**BY
SHANE LESLIE**

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**THE AMERICAN EDITION
IS HUMBLY DEDICATED TO
JOHN CARDINAL FARLEY
New York, 1917**

Hark, amid the prayers of pilgrims plying
Round the Isle of shrine and bed,
How the wind is sadder for the crying
Of the unremembered dead.

Whom the hunger scourged across the breakers,
Whom the ships of exile sped,
Hear them crying, "Will ye all forsake us
To the seas that sweep the dead?"

"Brothers, where your footprints pass unheeding
Once our paths and lifeways led,
Brothers, pray ere ye be gone and needing
Mass and dirges for the dead."

"Pray for us where Patrick's lips were praying;
Pray for us by Brendan's bed.
Soon in turn your children may be laying
You among the watchful dead."

Almost may you hear the wan half-sleepers
From their purgatorial bed
Crying unto God—"O Reaper, reap us
Lest we droop for ever dead."

PREFACE

This little book gives a glimpse of a very legendary past. The first story is of the nature of an allegory. The second and third I gleaned from the spirit of old Celtic monasteries. "The Coming of the Danes" is a story told of many holy places at the time. The others are more historical, for the visions of Owen were in most libraries of the Middle Ages, and the expulsion of the canons is remembered yet in the people's tradition.

S. L.

INTRODUCTION

HIDDEN away in the southern high-lands of Tir-conail, within a storm's cry of the Atlantic, lies Derg, the holy lough of Ireland. Round her desolate shores cluster the bleak, billowy hills that merge northward in the rocky chain of the Bearnas-mor, eastward into the green floating plains of Tir-owen, and southward to the waters of the Erne.

It is a long passage of time since the men of Ireland first felt the mystery of those quiet little hills and looked for the unseen in the waters that lie at their feet, for the spiritual history of Derg stretches back into the dimmest age of legend. In the far past strange unholy rites were practised there. The cairns on the hills about are the gravestones of elder faiths that died of sheer old age.

Though little of the former worship of Ireland has come down to us, there is a wisp of flotsam to be gleaned drifting with the customs of the people. Here and there we may lay curious hands on some charm or rann that was in Ireland before Patrick, and is still borne on by the sacred current of Faith. No temples were left to bring wonder to the eyes of strangers, only a few gaunt circles of stone that have stood dumb and without meaning for so many centuries, yet perhaps not meaningless to all.

Once these grim stones were great among the heathen and received the homage of a religious race. Of the rise and splendour of Druidism there is no record. History reveals only its last phase, a slow and angry agony during the dawn of Rome's rebirth and second conquest of the world. Druids there remained throughout Ireland, and the people feared them pitifully unto their last hour. Their wise old bones must be lying by the red waters of Derg, but how have they perished that

even the place of their perishing has been lost? They are gone beyond the sweep of imagination, for even a dreamer practised in his dreaming will not easily see their white robes fluttering in the bygone oak forests, or the weird rites which some wise old women forgot a few generations back.

In the fullness of time there came to the people of Ireland one who had heard their crying in his sleep. In the fullness of time his voice was heard in the valleys and his feet crossed the mountains. Over Ireland he went laying the invisible foundations of the Holy City whose earthly counterpart is Rome. It is Patrick, the first historical figure on the blue immortal hills of Tir-conail. Kings and heroes are melting away into the mists and the Druids are forgetting their wisdom. With the bright zeal of an Apostle he has swept over the five kingdoms, driving men's hearts to the City of God. With all his fierce love there is a little wisdom as well, for rather than destroy all he

found he gladly consecrated many spots dear to the people, and turned many of their customs to the service of the True God. He broke down angrily the grinning idols that reigned in Leinster, but the wells and the oak groves that were made of God he could but bless, and they are blessed unto this day.

At Derg he found a spot of awe and eeriness. Men dreaded the cave on the little island as a very mouth of hell. It seemed to be the last stronghold of the powers of gloom and evil in Ireland. Whatever they were, unknown and hateful, Patrick met them during a forty days of fast and prayer and set their bounds for ever. Thence forward their weird lodging was to be hallowed by the Catholic religion. The legend comes to us with a bare simplicity — *loca purgatoria ostendit Deus* — God showed him the places of Purgatory.

It is a strange record from the past, but generations have held it for true, and it has entered the unwritten creed of Ire-

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land. It is difficult to gather what part the sanctuary played in the final conversion of the country. The annals of the time are gone. We only know that soon after the mission of Patrick, Derg and its storm-beaten little island was a centre of his Church. The haunting memories of evil perished and it came under the protection of a community of monks. With Saint Dabheoc as their founder they planted themselves on the great green ridge known to this day as Saint's Island. It is the name of Dabheoc that still lives in the townland of Seavoc hard by. This seat is still jealously guarded there by the peasantry, as a place might be kept at the fireside for an absent friend.

These were the Culdees or gillies of God who entrenched themselves among the Celtic peoples. It was by their love and devotion that the fire came to the lighthouses of God scattered about the Scottish seas. It was theirs to keep Holy Lore from the destroyer, and, though they were to perish themselves in the raids of

the Danesmen, it was the light of their lamps that illuminated the Church far on into the dark ages, till the day when Francis and Dominic relit the altar-flames of God. At Derg the ruins of their foundation have been left under the moss, and, stranger still, a remnant of their strong discipline has reached us, too. The three days of fasting, the night spent in prison, the prayers prayed in the cold water at the Pilgrimage to-day, are all in glorious descent from the time of the Culdees. They are the strong customs of a strong people — a native growth that never found root under the warm skies of Italy. Is it not written in the Martyrology of Donegal? The little quatrains that celebrate the Celtic Saints can be understood by the pilgrims of to-day. There was Saint Ciaran who was often in a vat of water for the love of God, Saint Fiontain who ate but bread of barley corn and drank but water of earthly clay; Saint Cormac, Bishop, King and Martyr, who sang thrice fifty psalms in the fountain of

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Lough Tarb. The spirit of such heroes of prayer lingers yet in Derg.

During the great missionary era Derg became a spiritual centre. There is only a memory left of those impassioned bands of young men who went forth without purse or script, by twenties and by fifties, conquering and to conquer. Among the shrines of Europe lie the bell-men and book-men who visited her from the west in her dark years. Many who sleep to-day behind perfumed tombs in Italy or Switzerland learnt their mission at Derg and drew strength by her hillsides.

Then, in a sudden of time, the Danesmen swept across Ireland, and for a while everything was wrapt in a sea-mist of blood. They sowed seaports and sea-towns along the eastern coast until they, too, met their perishing in the Meadow of the Bull. Now had Derg reached a peace as of a ripening summer. The springtide of overflowing Faith had left her and spent itself in the Alps and the Apennines. A grey winter was yet in

store, in which Ireland and Derg were to share the one sorrow and brave the one storm. Here and there behind the broken canopy of Irish history we can discern the bright waters of the lough. Even in the age of Faith, Derg was not always safe, for there were wild souls in Ireland, and at the hands of one of these, a MacMahon, the monastery was sacked. But there were ever hands to build anew, and it is just before the great pillage that Derg touched European fame.

The visions that a knight called Owen had seen there passed into many tongues, setting on fire the wonder of men and poets. One book could hardly contain all that was written about Derg, for men are always greedy of such, and in those days he came to be reckoned a poor storyteller who had no marvel to relate of Saint Patrick's Purgatory.

Princes and rulers came bringing letters from the King of England and the Patriarch of Armagh demanding entrance to the cave, either to atone for some great

sin or to win a glimpse of the nether world. Among these was Perilhos, a very gentle knight of Spain, who came in armour at the head of a great company of cavaliers. To him appeared most fearfully and wonderfully his master, Juan King of Arragon. Now, Juan was dead these three years.

Another pilgrim was the Lord Rathold, of Hungary, who entered the cave with four relics of Holy Cross and portions of the tunic of Jesus Christ hung to his neck. To him appeared the devil tempting him horribly under several forms, whom the knight repulsed with his divine armoury. In the end his valour was rewarded, for Michael, captain of the host of heaven, stood by him and showed him the souls suffering in Purgatory, but more he would not let him see. The same guide told him how the souls are comforted, saying: "Twice in each week — on Sunday, when the Son of God was born, and again on Friday, when the same Lord God was pleased to die for sinners — I

come to comfort them, saying — In a little time God will have pity on you. And they cry out all together, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have pity on us, as Thou willest and knowest, so pity us, for Thy mercy is greater than our iniquity. Blessed art Thou who comest in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest and on earth." So Rathold returned with a letter from Mathew, Prior of the same place.

The record of many others who followed the same perilous quest survives. The Sire de Beaujeu, Louis de Sue, Louis of France, Malatesta of Hungary, and, not least, there came in the reign of King Henry VIII. the Cardinal Legate to England, who made a toilful journey across the swamps of Clogher till he was able to cross the lough in a hollowed tree. His letter has come to light in the correspondence of Isabella d'Este.

He crossed Ireland as the guest of the Archbishop and the Earl of Kildare. Dundalk he found in ruins, and Omagh

full of thieves. Two of his companions remained in the cave for ten days. It was the custom, he notes, for visitors to make their wills. Some he saw standing up to their necks in water. He also noticed in the book of pilgrims kept in the church the name of Guarino da Durazzo.

Then the great winter swept over the land, and, with the winter, the flail that scourged Ireland spared not Derg. The great religious houses fell an easy prey to the spoiler, and one day the spoiler stood by the shores of the lough. Rough soldiery turned the canons of St. Augustine adrift and sacked the island, but it remained, though beaten by the storms and mutilated by Acts of Parliament, the shrine of the Gael and the symbol of his own history.

Gaeldom, broken and bleeding, turned to the broken shrine, the desolate to the desolated.

In these days the children of Patrick turned from their home carrying the knowledge of their God from pole to pole.

Wherever England's argosies spread a network of Empire and commerce, the exiles of Ireland followed bearing only the pearl of great price and the secret traffics of the Kingdom of Heaven. It rested to the glory of Spain in her proudest hour to lay a new continent in the treasure of the Church, but it was reserved to Ireland, out of her poverty and abasement, to set the churches of America and Australia in the diadem of Peter.

The island of the Purgatory did not suffer so pitiably as the island of Saints, for we read in the seventeenth century of an altar there, overhung by an image of Our Lady and the Saviour, with the Crucifixion on the right and on the left the three Kings—a last view of loveliness.

The dark night following is broken only by the piteous cry of Henrietta Maria, the Catholic Queen of England, praying Wentworth to spare Derg and to allow the time-hallowed devotions to be continued. She promises that the people will

use his permission modestly (*Iss en useront sy modestement*).

In those days the Franciscan lived at Derg in wattled huts, with a poor cross of twigs where silver and gold had been. In the end even the brown friars were hunted away, and then it grew very dark for Ireland. Her last treasures were torn out of her wounded hands and she ate of the bread of tears till she could weep to more. The music of a thousand years was stifled and the song of her bards sank very low. Turlough O'Carolan, the last of them, made his way to Derg in his old age. It is still remembered how the old man recognized a withered old hand that was stretched to help him to land, as that of Bridget Cruise, a love of other days. So does a dream of beauty haunt the men of Ireland to their graves.

The pilgrimage outlived the storm. When the dawn of freedom came it found the faithful clustered round the sanctuary of Derg.

Year by year the Gaelic heart turns

thither, as the magnet to the north, and pilgrims come across the division of the seas. The sighs of dead generations are heavy in the air, and the very stones are steeped with their prayers.

On the red tideless water is writ the destiny of Ireland.

To-day are the mountains there more desolate than ever, and even the kites and eagles are gone —

“Time will wear the very stone
Ireland's eagles all have flown;
Of things old her Faith alone
Stands unconquered and the same.”

Above the multitudes of the pilgrims the greater multitude of the Saints tread the storm-ridden skies.

From the watchers below a great cry still reaches to the Lady of Heaven, to Mary, the joy of the Gael, whose feet rest on Iona; Mary, clothed with the bright treasure of the northern seas, whose loveliness yet lights the cottage homes of the west; Mary, whose girdle is the love of

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Ireland, whose hair is bound with the stars that shine upon the holy lakes of Ireland.

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The Story of St. Patrick's Purgatory

THE COMING OF PATRICK

THOUGH the great rath was filled with fighting-men, yet a great silence lay in the air above, the heavy silence when the winds are at peace and men's thoughts are turned to war. It was strange, for men of battle are not over-given to thinking. Nevertheless, around the great timbered palace that crowned the rath and among the wicker houses that crowded the slopes men were standing in moody silence. A few women folk passed along the rath-works from time to time. In the great mound by the palace lay the hostages. They, too, were silent.

All that summer day the High King had been sinking. Every long-drawn

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hour of it he had lain unsleeping in the largest room of his palace. His large limbs, all harnessed for battle, pressed heavily on a heap of rough skins. The room had been filled with shadow, but his eyes were not yet darkened, for they looked fiercely into the passage that led to the open air beyond.

Two sullen figures stood in the dying sunlight. They were both of gaunt and angry aspect. One was the keeper of the King's chessmen, the other was the avenger of his insults. They, too, waited in silence.

Throughout the day the younger Druids had passed to and fro in the room, whispering in low tones. They had laid healing herbs in the sword marks on the King's body, and from hour to hour they had weighed his life upon twigs of stripped yew. Twilight had found them at their labours, and for all their wisdom the black wounds were running to the death. The cunning of their fingers failed them again and again, and the

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knowledge lying in the heart of each of them caused them to fail even the more. For not one but knew that the King's shield had moaned aloud in the battle, and with the moaning of their shields the heroes of Ireland were doomed to die.

While the sun rode in the high sky, and even while it slanted down to meet the heather hills, the hot blood kept playing about the King's heart, but with dusk the chills of death crept into his veins, and the breath was troubled in his throat.

In the end the Druids left him to his own shift and the King was thinking bitterly in his mind. He thought of all the gold and all the sword-iron he had stored in his palace to no purpose. He thought, too, of the skulls of his foemen heaped in the speckled house outside. He wondered grimly if they could know of his hap.

The warrior men were still waiting on the earthworks outside. No one moved on the paths that ran from the rath through the triple ramparts and out to the

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forests beyond. Their eyes looked to the quiet grey silences and the great wastes. Around them lay the waste of woodland, and the waste of bogland, and the waste of lough water. Among themselves they wondered how long they could hold their own, and their leader standing dead in the clay with a blind sword in his hand. Strange and wayward seemed the curse upon the heads of men that such a strong one might turn over to death, and the blood scarce dry on the spoils he had taken. These were rare thoughts for such warriors, whose hearts were more curious of the passing of a battle than of the burden of many years.

On a sudden a white figure rose at the lowest of the three earth-walls and came slowly up the height. He was a tall man with the crooked neck of age upon him and angry eyes in his wise face. Straight he mounted to the head of the rath, looking neither to right of him nor to left. As he passed, the fighting men turned to watch him, but shivered as they let him

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by. "It is Torna, the Druid," they whispered. He had reached the palace door by now. Under the heavy log lintels he passed, with his white robe gathered in his fingers.

The King lay in a restless slumber, and saw not his silent visitor entering. In his hard agony he turned this way and that. Gouts of blood crawled down his stiffening limbs and dyed the badger skins and fox skins of his bed. Torna waited beside him as an old water crane that stands near the ebbing tide. At last the King woke, and knew his visitor with a weary look in his red eyes.

"Torna, I am very glad of thy coming; Torna, I have cried for thee since I was borne from the battle."

"I am not glad," replied the old Druid; "little glad am I to see the hand that was once full of gifts hard bitten by the sword." There was a pause of time, and the King spoke.

"Torna, there are strange clouds gathering over mine eyes, not the joyous mist

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that rises in the wine cup, but the blackness as of rain in the night-time; speak to me, Torna, Druid of Druids, Torna, wiser than wisdom. Is it death that is come upon me?"

"A smaller wisdom than mine can see that thy cloud is one that cometh but once over a man." The Druid spoke with no sign on his face.

With a cry the King turned back to his troubled slumbers. He seemed to mutter, and after a while his mutterings passed to the shape of words and he spoke clear —

"Strange dreams lie before and behind me, Torna, for already I think that I see my own spirit sitting at the cold hearths of the dead, and it is not well with them. Again, I see strangers sitting among the High Kings of Ireland that are to be, and it is not well with them."

"Strangers, O King! there must be in Ireland till the wearing away of time."

Then the King spoke yet more slowly.

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"Torna, I see grief for you and for all the white magic of the Druids."

"Long have I known that grief is coming upon us, O King! and others have known too. There cometh an adze-head, with a crook-head staff in his hand, and he will chant a song unholy from his table, and his household will be answering, Amen, Amen."

"I see a Druid that is no Druid sitting with the wise men of Ireland and his robe is as brown as the peat."

"That is he, O King! that is Patrick, the fisher of men."

"Who is Patrick, and what is the way of his fishing?"

"He is the love friend of Jesus, whom men call the King of the Wounds, but I can tell thee little of his fishing, save that he hath nets laid over the high hills of Ireland."

"Torna, would my sword be easy cutting the nets of Jesus?" and the King fondled his cold bedfellow, for in those

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days the Kings of Ireland honoured their swords by night as well as by day.

"No, O King! your sword cannot avail you, for the Queen of Heaven has woven them out of the floating treasure of the sea, and the spirits of men will be lying in them like the silver herrings in the folds of a rope-net."

Then the King turned on his side and lay still, while the darker twilight fastened upon the sky. The sun was away now, but no man thought to light a fire. It would be enough to wait on the King's burial. The rath lay in darkness.

For the last time the old warrior drew himself up from his clotted couch, with the half-dreams playing in the eyes.

"Torna, what is the wild music that reaches my ear from every hill in Ireland? I know well the red music that plays men into battle and the white music that sings to us feasting, but this is neither one or the other."

"It is the bells that the friends of Jesus are ringing through the land."

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“And for what is their ringing?”

Then the Druid sobbed angrily between his words — “They are ringing them against the death of the Druids.”

Long the two waited in silence. The King still gazed into the dark before him, then he said —

“Eagles have flown into the winds and black fowl of the sea.”

“They have come to tear the nets of Patrick,” said the Druid, “but we shall not see the day.”

“Torna, there is a lough between the cloven hills and the water in it runs red.”

The Druid leapt from his seat. “It is red, red with the blood of the friends of Jesus,” he cried, passionately.

“Speak on, Torna, is their death bitter? Surely there is a bitterness in their death.”

“Bitter-sweet it is, very bitter and yet very sweet, for I can see their blood under the starlight of a long cold night. It is a great sorrow to them that they have got the King of Wounds over them.”

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"Why talk of their sorrow, when I can only see my own sorrow?" moaned the King. "Let them bury me upright and my face set against the men of Connact. Give my sword to my hand. I have given it a soft feeding all these years. It must starve now. Oh! it is bitter that my wheel-brooch must lie on the breast of another. It is hard to die like an ox on the straw. Would I had never left the red field."

There was a long quiet and the King spoke for the last time, "Only let me hear the harp-music ere I die."

Then Torna, the Druid, plucked the royal harp from the wall and played of life and of death, of all the wonders in Ireland and of the greatness of Kings and of the sorcery of the Druids, but how an equal end cometh unto all. Out of the perishing twilight he played into the grim night, and he remembered the fierce blood songs of Ulster, till the fighting men outside roared out for the love of killing that came to them, and no King to be leading

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them out. And in the mound near by the hostages heard the playing, and moaned like small birds in their nest.

Little the old man heeded, for he played fiercely anon and anon he played sadly. His hooked fingers crept among the harp strings like sickles moving in the wheat.

Fiercely he played because of the dying of the High King and sadly because of the heavy nameless doom that was on the race of the Druids.

With that singing the dark had passed into the greater night, but the High King had long ceased to hear him, for his spirit was sitting beside the dead fighting men of Ireland.

THE VISION OF DABHEOC

NOW, how Patrick, the love-friend of Jesus, came in his wanderings to Derg and remained for forty days and forty nights on the island is well remembered in Ireland, and how the loneliness of God came upon him, and how, for all his trial and sorrow, he saw visions beyond the dreams of men.

Fewer have remembrance of Dabheoc, the gilly of Heaven, who came on Patrick's footsteps and stayed to pray till his own death. With Dabheoc came others of a like mind and served him in the rough house of stone he had built. By the beauty of their living and by the power of their penance they had the most of the people won away from the Druids. But the fight between them was a fierce and quenchless one while it raged, for the old hill sorcery was hard for the Saints to con-

The Vision of Dabheoc 13

quer. For a while the terrible Druids had been seen moving in the mountains near by and their rites were still offered amid the trembling thickets, but Dabheoc feared them little, and held his own. Do what they might, he laid altar against blood-stone, and chant against rune, and prayer against curse, till in the end the old Druids wandered away, and the last of them died alone upon the hills.

So was the first battle of the Faith won, and as years slipt by only Dabheoc was left of those warrior monks, for some had died by the wild elements and others by their hard penances, and others very fearfully in the fire of the Druids.

There was a long band of young men who made their way over the mountains to join the rule. Though they found it hard to the body, it seemed sweet enough to the soul. But their number increased, and no little strength and prosperity was added to them. The younger brethren built wicker huts of strong woven twigs, and laid out an apple-garden and a herb

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garden. Above all the work of their hands was the great chapel of timber wood. They had raised it, every beam, by their own labour, and they had filled it with the untiring song of their lips. Day by day, like the bee-folk in the heather, they followed out their chosen rule and kept their lives sweet with activity. Some had turned to the digging of soil, and planted seeds and herbs, till they had won to themselves the wisdom of plants and the healing of leaves.

Others betook them to writing on parchments and painting the Gospels with colours they had picked off the rocks. In those days the making of books was long and troublesome, even to the wearing away of men's lives. First, there were the designs to be pencilled by the best craftsman in the monastery. And then the others would sit day upon day over one smooth page spreading the little rivers of red and yellow through and round the lettering, little rivers that wound about the pages, with bright purple banks

The Vision of Dabheoc 15

curling and folding in and out, yet never breaking over the line or letting a purple sod drop into the yellow stream.

It was on the initial of Christ that they lavished the whole wealth of their brushes. Round the Sacred Letter with an unbroken exactitude they twined the glorious broidery, line upon line, curve out of curve, wreath into wreath. They gathered into the one page the colours of the sky and the beauty of the earth, the burnished mail of dragons, and the slender shapes of the mountain grass. If men wonder to this day at the love and endurance that wrought such books to perfection, it is because they do not understand the mind of writers who would have deemed their whole lives too short, and the very blue of heaven and the red of their own blood unworthy stuff to emblazon the Name of the Eternal.

Year in and year out they fashioned their Gospels and sent them hanging around the necks of missionaries into the broad world beyond. In aftertime these

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same books and their metal coverings were found as far apart as the plains of Italy and the white fies of Iceland. A strange and lovely witness to those same children of Patrick, who mingle their sleep in the vineyards of the south and in the ice-beds of the north. Summer and winter, it was always harvest time to them, and the while they laboured, their brethren in the monasteries of Ireland fashioned the wherewithal of their reaping.

It was over such as these that Dabheoc ruled till he reached his old age, great and honoured among all the houses of Ireland. Calm were his last years, but, although he told it not, there was a dark grief in the well of his heart. He was troubled because he was soon to go out of the world, and yet he had never seen any vision of the world that was to come. He had spent his life, as the other saints of Ireland, in holy combat with his own soul. Many had he trained to bear the brown robe and the heavy cord. Many had already reached heaven in the light of

The Vision of Dabheoc 17

his counselling. Still the vision that he yearned was lacking to his eyes. Often he had felt in his heart the Holy Powers that move in the world and above the world, but never once had any passed into the sight of his eyes. Visions had come upon the other brethren. Some had seen the faithful sitting in great joy, and others had seen the souls in Purgatory wrestling to their perfection. Even among the youngest of them was one who had seen the angel folk standing on the white hills at sunrise. But Dabheoc stretched out his hand in vain to gather the dream-fruit that hangs from the wall of another world. It was not for him, though he had kept vigil in his high mountain seat that lies this day between Derg and Erne. No whisper came to the weary ears of the watcher of the lakes. No sign entranced his eyes. His prayers, his fasts, his vigils, all seemed to break upon the bar of heaven like lost birds in a storm.

Sometimes a sore weariness would come upon him, and even a smoulder of

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anger rise in his heart, but not for long, so well had the Saint learnt to trample his own passions into the dust, and so rule the brethren. *Beati qui non viderunt* he would often say, yet oftener would he wish that he was not so blessed.

There came a day when Dabheoc sat in his wattled cell watching the gardened slope that led down to the water edge. A well-mounded rampart ran round the close. Now and again a heavy-robed figure passed across. The hush of Vespertide had fallen, and the quiet as of many tasks done. Dabheoc turned his eyes sadly over the old book satchels that were hanging on the wall. How many hours of his were stored away in them to the use of other men? How much of his sight had been woven into those pages?

When his eyes turned back to the doorway, he saw a Pilgrim standing there. He, too, carried a brown robe, but it was thickened with the dust of white roads and His feet lay bruised between their sandals. His body seemed weak with journeying

The Vision of Dabheoc 19

and in need of refreshment. In His eyes alone there was no weariness, they were deep and beautiful and blue as the skies of Italy.

"Enter, friend, enter; this is a house of rest," said the Saint, "is it very far that thou hast come?"

"A long and a weary way, Dabheoc, ruler of the Culdees," replied a voice of great sweetness.

"Is it peace that thou bearest with thee, stranger, for mine eyes are too dim to read the faces of men?"

"My peace have I brought these many years to all that would have it," the sweet voice began again. "I have brought my peace for thee, Dabheoc, for all the fret that is on thy heart."

"I see that thou canst read the mind of a man's heart. Art thou ruler of a religious order?"

"Yes, of the greatest of the orders, the Order of the Wayfarers."

"What is thy quest, dear stranger?"

"I have come to find my friends."

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"Who are thy friends?"

"My friends are all the Saints of Ireland who are born and are yet to be born."

"I do not understand what thou wouldst say, but I see that thou art older than any here though thou hast come as a Pilgrim, perchance thou hast memory of our holy Father Patrick?"

"Before Patrick was, I am." The voice of the Pilgrim spoke like a bell far off.

Then the old Saint felt that it was no ordinary man his old eyes were striving to see. His whole soul struggled out to meet the Stranger standing at the doorway. A feeling of peace and yet delirious joy was upon him. He could only see the two eyes that they looked upon him with love. It seemed then as if his poor spirit were fluttering over those pools of calm unmoved Divinity. Then the wondrous vision past from his eyes and he was looking dimly to the blue waters beyond.

He rose and went down to the water

The Vision of Dabheoc 21

side as fast as his old age would let him. As he crossed the mound he inquired of each brother he met if they had seen which way the Pilgrim had passed, but no one had seen ought on the island that day. Not once, but several times, the old man passed up the island with tears of joy brimming from his eyes. There was no footprint to be seen, but on a bare rock he saw a little wisp of thorn and the red drops falling into the dust beside.

That summer Dabheoc died at Derg, with the vision still in his dark sight, and he was buried under the thorn tree by the other brethren.

Beautiful was the stone cross they carved above him, Dabheoc, the Saint of Derg, who had seen the Holy Wayfarer in the twilight of his years.

THE PENANCE OF CIARAN

FROM the burying time of Patrick, the Apostle, until the third order of Irish Saints had passed from the land, the number of those who believed in Jesus increased. Aforetime they had been but a few scattered here and there, keeping their new wisdom to their own souls for fear of the Druids. Now were they gathering their families and their friends behind ramparts and walls. Others were carrying the good tidings through every cranny and every field of Ireland. Church rose upon church and tower upon tower. The land was at peace. The tribes of the hill, as well as the plainmen, gave themselves gladly to the creed that had vanquished the angry old Druids. The windows of heaven were opened upon Ireland. The rivers ran more joyously to the sea. The holy wells bubbled with happiness, and the

The Penance of Ciaran 23

valleys sang with the rich music of the waving corn that grew for the bloodless altars of God. The great loughs of Ireland were lulled with a new beatitude. The grim deities that haunted them were driven away and their sanctuaries stolen, and of their names but a few were not blotted out of the speech of the people. Like shadows they hid them in the sea caves of the western shores, and even there the brazen bells of Patrick followed them.

As Ossian cried —

“Alas, O Finn who triumphed over thee,
Alas, O Oscar whither is gone thy strength?”

The men of Ireland looked now to the Kingdom of Christ, and in the religious houses that Kingdom had verily begun.

Years slipt by and the unwonted calm had begun to break. The joy of battle had mingled too often in the blood of the people for them to live at peace for ever. Old jealousies were wrapt, like fat, round their hearts, and the waters of baptism

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had not washed away the feuds that lay among the royal clans of Ireland. Old stirrings were about in the country, signals passing from mouth to mouth. Men began to remember they owed duties to their Kings as well as to their God. Once again the reaping-hooks were hammered into blades. The houses of religion alone took no part in the strife. They had a warfare of their own. All the country about Derg was at war. Tribe had risen against tribe. The same sunlight that lit the bronze cross in the monastery would be twinkling the other side of the mountains on the spears' points of the O'Donnells marching to war.

One evening it came that the sea winds were plunging over the lough and a gale screaming overhead and flinging streamers of sea-mist over the land. The hills were filling with the salt smell of the tides. The distant moaning of the sea was like a rumour of war. The driven rain never ceased a moment whipping the dark waters into a sheet of spray. Wildly it

The Penance of Ciaran 25

passed over the lough, and leaping passionately upon the face of the mountains fled wailing down their valleys in long training gusts. The Abbot of Derg stood up with his back to the storm. He had heard talk of these raids and harryings, and he looked angrily to the east, whither the tribes of Conail had marched. War seemed senseless to him, somewhat between the brawling of men and the playing of children. Foolish enough, it was worse when it desolated the gardens of the Church. What was a battle indeed that came and perished in the blood of men, waged for love of women or greed of the tilth-land? To the old Abbot there was only one warfare, and that an imperishable one, the striving of men who lay hands on the treasure of Heaven. He grudged bitterly all the young men who hurried away at the least call to slay and be slain, leaving only greyheads to man the vineyards of God. And all the while the world was passing away—swifter even than the rain-clouds that tore

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from mountain to mountain. And with the world was moving all the pomp and vanity of her, and melting away as the clouds that melted before their mad race was finished. It angered him to think of human folk setting so great a price on her dying vanities and struggling to hoard her flying pomp. Had not God set the mark of decay on everything that He created? Were not the winds wearing the very mountains and crumbling them slowly into the earth at their feet? Did not the licking tongue of death caress every child that was born into the world?

Old memories were rising in his brain. His eyes looked compassionately across the water to the turbid world he had quitted forty years before. Then his mind wandered back to a strange dream one of the monks had dreamt the night past. He had told the others in the refectory how he had awakened in the silent hours and seen the unshriven souls of fighting-men killed in the weary war. A fearful sight it was. They sat with the swords

The Penance of Ciaran 27

and broken arrows sticking in their flesh, and their faces buried in their hands, and their bodies were lean and spotted with blood. His dream had been received with fear and wonder by the others. All that day their prayer and laboured chants went up for the unknown dead, whose piteous hap had been so strangely revealed. Knights of God as they were they saw in the vision a summons to fall to the succour of souls distressed. From the early Mass they had prayed, and on to the third and sixth hours. It was past noon now and near to Vespers, and still they prayed with unbroken fast. They were of the children of the Gael, strong in heart and strong in body, and well broken to the conflicts of prayer. Some were almost lying on the hard ground, their elbows fretted with the stones. Others lifted their hands in passionate entreaty, as though they were clutching the souls of the lost.

The rain fell without respite, and still the Abbot stood on the shore. On the

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lake side appeared the figure of a young man moving in the heather. Then he disappeared from sight. A few minutes later he was rowing in some rough bark he had discovered toward the island. The wind was against him, but his strong body availed to pull the boat across the running foam. At last he had run it on to the rocks. He stood up to survey the scene before him. He was tall and stalwart. His legs and arms were bare. A dull saffron dress hung over his shoulders, fastened across his breast with some kind of a brooch. The deeply coloured folds were stained with darker traces of blood. A sword-belt twisted round his waist, dangled uselessly at his side. His keen eyes soon caught sight of the Abbot, who was already wondering if this wild visitor had ought to do with the dreams of the past night. With a low cry the young man sprang ashore and ran up the slope on which the Abbot stood. He fell on his knees pouring forth a flood of impassioned Irish. His eyes almost started

The Penance of Ciaran 29

from his face, and his long hair streamed in the wind as he pleaded to enter religion on the very day. The Abbot listened with anger and yet a certain pity in his heart. He drew up his robe lest the hated blood-stains should defile it, and answered —

“There is no place here, no place for men of blood. Your business hath brought us sorrow already. Yester night a score of souls passed away in a storm of blood, like twittering swallows carried down a gale. My brethren are faint praying for their release.”

The young man would not rise from his knees, but cried the louder to be admitted into the monastery. He prayed also for penance, as he had slain one very near and dear to him in the hazard of battle. But the Abbot only murmured over and over again with a quavering voice —

“Man-slaying, man-slaying, man made unto the image of God. I know not what penance would suffice. We have no such sins among the brethren. Wait, my son,

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till sunset and I will bring thee word again."

In the soft twilight the Abbot returned to find the postulant still resolute to enter, and still praying on his knees.

Meantime, the council of the brethren had considered what should be done with this wild weed cast up by the storm.

"Brother," said the Abbot, slowly, "it hath seemed good to the brethren that you should share in their sorrow and in their penance. But first thou must wash the blood out of thy hand and out of thy dress. Thou must wait on the rocks here till the cloud water rot the robes off thy belt and eat away thy sword-belt. If thou acceptest such a penance it is well. If thou endurest steadfast I will give thee the sweet robe of Christ, and thou shalt wear the rope that is worn by His Saints. Be of a strong courage and fearful only lest thy desire come not to its rest."

In this manner came Ciaran, the fighter, unto his penance. Day and night he

The Penance of Ciaran 31

prayed in the open. Day and night he knelt or lay among the bare rocks, till all his fighting gear was worn away and the wind slipped through the rents, as through the sails of a drifting ship. It was a hard trial, for the brothers who brought him his bread at mid-day and at evening were not allowed to speak a word of comfort. At last one spoke and said the Abbot was well pleased, but he must learn the Latin psalms before he took his place with the brethren. So Ciaran began to learn from him the words of the divine office. Every day the brother slowly uttered a new verse, and Ciaran repeated it many times to himself. The others watched him compassionately from afar. At night they could hear the fighting man shouting out the Latin against the storm: *De profundis . . . clamavi ad te . . . Domine. Domine . . . exaudi . . . vocem meam. . .*

At last the Abbot deemed that he had kept his penance and was worthy to join the order. Trembling and storm-beaten

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Ciaran was led up to the gate of the monastery. His matted hair was cut to the skull, sandals were slipped under his weary feet, his wet cheeks were kissed, and a brown robe thrown over his shoulders. Then the Abbot shrived him and tied a knotted rope about him.

"It is well, my son, thou art clearly a warrior," he said, "see that thou goest to a nobler combat and a fairer victory than hitherto. The warfare of the monastery is keener than the fight of the field."

That even he stood for the first time in the low built choir and heard the psalms he had learnt so painfully chanted more sweetly than the lapping tide. With a sad half-weary moan the holy Latin heaved from side to side of the long chapel on the alternate singing of the monks. Like the ordered waves that toss behind the harbour bar, antiphon moved upon psalm and psalm upon antiphon. There was no respite and there was no hurry. They were rushing fast into the gulf of

The Penance of Ciaran 33

eternity, but all the while eternity lay at their feet for the taking. As in a dream Ciaran watched the others gathering round him to sing a joyous Te Deum.

THE COMING OF THE DANES

TIME brought a fierce scourging to Ireland. Three fierce people set upon her in turn, and the print of their handiwork has scarce left her to this day. Furrows were ploughed in the heart of her people that have not closed with the mould of years. Little that they prized was spared by their invaders. The great forests in which they found shelter for their bodies were swept off the soil, and the religious houses where they rested their souls perished likewise. It was ill to say that it befel by the anger or by the love of God, for there were days when the heavens no longer seemed to be above Ireland.

The first and the fiercest of these strangers were the people of Denmark. With a fever of blood in their hearts they

The Coming of the Danes 35

swept over the five kingdoms of Ireland. The native tribes of the north or the south were too busied with their own feuds and hatreds to allow themselves ever to be brought to the one hosting under the one King, until the enemy had his will of the land of a people who fought with each other as bitterly as they fought with the foe. As their sword-points moved over the land, a sad rumour was ever running in advance mingled of the cries of the wounded and the battle songs of the wound-givers. Rumour, ill or good, seldom found its way to the sanctuary of Derg, till the day a great fire was lit on the height of Cullion, a mountain to the south of the lough. It was the mountain folk who were fleeing before an invader, and had left this fire of their charity to warn the unheeding islanders. The brethren were not slow to read what the fiery sign meant, but, inasmuch as they had left their homes many years before, it seemed a vain thing to be taking flight a second time. So they stayed on their

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island and prayed, as was their wont, while the world outside laboured with the moil and rumour of war. Now and again a strange piece of tidings would reach them. It was said that the Danesmen spared not the houses of God. The holy places of Clones and Devenish had been plundered and their praying folk put to the sword as though they were the common fighting men. It was said that the Erne had run red with blood and the skies had been disordered with flame. The countryside was already bereft of people. Still the brethren waited. Still fresh news of desolation and murder came to their ears. As yet no witness had lived to tell them what manner of men these Danesmen were, for that was news they were wont to bring themselves.

One soft autumn noon, the lough lay in a haze of golden mist. Behind the eastern clouds the sun puffed out some streaks of red, angry and livid in their broken setting, but softened and mellowed ere they reached the hillsides of Ireland or rested

The Coming of the Danes 37

on far-off little flakes of dreamy cloud. It was then that a group of strange men were seen on the lough shore. They were clad in heavy skins, fastened over their shoulders with great belts of gold. Though they shouted loudly towards the monastery, the holy brethren thought well to discipline any idle curiosity, and betook themselves more than carefully to their different tasks.

The Danesmen, for such they were, shouted all the more, till, finding the islanders were deaf as well as blind, they turned to search for such boats as they had been accustomed to find on the Irish loughs. After some trouble they found a few narrow pieces of craft, which they launched and paddled rapidly to the island. Above the splash of their heavy oars rose the angry song of the sword, first but a whisper, then a wail that ended with a terrible melody that shot the beating blood through their heads. It was the song that few ever heard and lived to tell, the war-song the Danesmen had sung

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in every sea save their own. The boats crashed into the rocks, and the strangers leapt into the shallows and mounted the slopes of the island. At the sight of the poor wattled huts the children of Wodan and Thor laughed long and bitterly. It seemed a poor business to come across that length of country to set fire to these old huts and to feed their swords with a few old men. Nevertheless, slaying was good for its own sake and the land was well rid-ded of these hoarse singers of psalms. Strong and beautiful they were, standing in the low lapping water or leaping over the mossy rocks. Their skins lay loosely upon them, showing here and there heavy knots of flesh and old wounds that looked not to have known a leech. The gales had warmed their faces brown, and their eyes were red with the wine of the sea. That morning they had left their fort at the foot of the Barnesmor mountains and pressed inland searching new battle pas-ture for their swords.

The brethren had put in order their in-

The Coming of the Danes 39

struments of toil and were gathered round the doors of the monastery church. They looked not as men altogether unprepared for death. Ciaran stood a few paces in front of the rest. He had been a fighter in his young day, and the scent of battle came not to him amiss. As the first stranger laid hands upon him, he seemed to quiver and draw himself up to a struggle. Then his sudden passion fell as quickly as it rose, and he let himself be bound and knotted with his own rope. He turned round to see that all were bound and helpless as himself. Some had a look of fear on their faces. Others looked joyously over the water to the blue hills of Tirowen beyond. It was a long day since they had walked over those heights.

The Danesmen passed into their church, hacking at the walls for trace of treasure. They found nothing save the heavy painted psalters, and for such they had little use.

One of the younger men began the old

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blood song they used to sing before battle, and as he sang the others were dragging the swords from their sheaths. It was an old song that had been sung by every nation since the beginning of the world. It gives the slayer the lust of his slaying, but it makes death easier to the slain. Again and again they caught up their comrade's strains, and each time that the wild chant paused one of them shot his sword through the sackcloth and into the worn body beneath. As each monk died the others, emboldened by his martyrdom, sang loudly *Deo gratias*. Fear and languor had left their faces. In their eyes shone a soft lust to die for God. It seemed to the Danesmen they were seeking the sword-point with a strange eagerness, for their desire, as they pressed forward on their knees, was as the desire of men who receive the Host.

Seeing this the Danish leader stopped the killing when only two were left alive. One of these was Ciaran the Abbot.

The Coming of the Danes 41

Now, the Danesmen were angered at the happiness of the men they slew. To them it was past understanding how they could be eager to die with their hands bound behind them. They knew only of Valhalla where a fierce joy awaited the spirits of men that came in stained with the red battle. Valhalla, where all who had died valorously feasted and drank out of the skulls of their enemies. But those who died softly, without a sword in their hand or blood in their eyes, it would be a cold feasting they would find in the halls of the dead.

Their leader moved across the island, leaving the others as they were. In his mind he was searching for a bitterer path of death. For a moment he halted within the church, and looked curiously at the anguished Figure on the crucifix. He wondered what it could mean; then, laughing like a child, he called a companion to him. He pointed his rough hand to the altar and spoke a few words. The other

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ran down to the boat and pulled out the rough wooden pegs against which the oars were swung.

The two monks watched in sad wonder. It seemed that they were to lose their crown at the last moment. They prayed that God might give them what he had lavished on their companions. They had not long to wait. A few short words from the leader and they were dragged up to the front of their own church. The two heavy doors were opened and all entered. Ciaran was lifted from the floor and held with arms outstretched against the inside door. His companion was laid out upon the other. The Danesmen moved swiftly, and few words fell between their lips. Their leader smiled as each gaunt arm was raised and strong hands beat the rowing pegs through the wrists. A few blows from a war axe drove the pegs clean through the boards. Then, with no little laughter, they went out and down to their boats, swinging too the doors as they went.

The Coming of the Danes 43

It was Vespertide. A fierce pain racked every muscle in their bodies. Their heads were filled with strange sounds. It seemed as though every board in the church was creaking. Hammers resounded on the walls, and their limbs were wrenched with the noise of them. The wooden pegs seemed to be driven into their very temples. Time became very long. Their pain grew, and they wondered when they were to die. Then a half-consciousness came upon the stricken twain. The noises grew lower and lower. They could only hear the blood tearing across their brains. Far away, as in a dream, they could hear the Danesmen getting into their boats. The splash of oars followed the shouting of men. The old blood-song was rising over the water, but far off, and it died away as quickly as it came.

Then a great stillness brooded over the island. The torment in their agonised bones was hushed. The two crucified ones were thinking of the eternity before

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them. They had been thinking of it all their lives. Often they had sat and knelt in this same church and meditated on the Passion of God. Was there a holy Wound they had not felt in their hearts or a drop of Blood they had not marked on the sorrowful way? It seemed very wonderful to be hanging there themselves at the last. They thought of their dead brethren watching them from the mid-heavens far away. Still time went by and there came no end to their thinking. Silently they waited all this while, and they felt their pain ebb less and less. Once only the Abbot spoke with his burning tongue and said: *Domine non sum dignus* — Lord I am not worthy; and a little later he cried: *sitio* — I thirst.

Then they both knew that their pain had been set aside for ever. It seemed even as though they felt no more. A great freedom came upon them, and the hour of deliverance was there. They were moving, moving out of the church and into the grey dusk, and up into the

The Coming of the Danes 45

starlight above. They could even see their poor bodies nailed on to the boards, quite still. It seemed strange to be watching those poor mangled masks of clay. All was passing away — the island, the lough — even the mountains were like little molehills below. How small it all seemed then. Could life have really been so short? How poor and faint all their suffering had been. Life had been but a little hardship and a little prayer.

That night the spirits of Ciaran and his companion swept lightly over the fields of Purgatory. Their arms were stretched out as in ecstasy. Higher and yet higher they passed into a mist of glory.

As they entered into the Kingdom they could hear the voices of their dead brethren singing as for Vespertide.

THE COMING OF THE STRANGERS

NO record was kept of all the years that passed after the coming of the Danesmen till the Archbishop of Armagh sent a band of canons regular of the rule of Augustine. In this manner was Derg replanted from the house of SS. Peter and Paul. Once more the old glory revived, and new lamps hung before the ancient shrines.

The lives of these old canons, so full of activity and toil, were not lacking in communion with the unseen. Never a day could they spare from the Divine service. Every act in the garden or in the chapel was an act of symbolism or prayer. Gradually they rebuilt the monastery that the Danesmen had wasted, and ploughed up the tilth land. They planted the garden close with healing plants, and under

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the mounds sowed such flowers as call by their names on the Saints' protection. Spring and summer passed over the island in an embroidery of blossom. The winds carried new and richer scents to the bleak mountains beyond. Year upon year the unwearied hours of prayer followed the sun by day and the moon by night. Truly this was a little garden where God might not be displeased to walk in the cool of the day. Here the canons toiled as it were His gardeners, or as lay folk would call them His Saints. Flowers they watched and tended of a rarity and a beauty that men can scarce dream of. How often do men think of the blossoms of eternity, or look for travellers' joy or Passion-flowers? What is the mystic's Love-in-a-mist-of-tears to this present age? Perhaps sometimes, as men tread the rough heathery plains of the world, a stray perfume reaches them from these old monastic gardens.

Such was Derg in the days when all Europe was arming and marching to the east

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to wrest the burying-place of God from the hands of the Moslem. Look at Derg to-day, and it is not hard for the memory to run back over the centuries. The great loughs of Ireland change little with time. Their depths are still deep enough to bury the cities and civilisations of to-day as they engulfed those of the past. In old days there were little brown billows tumbling round Saint's Island and singing in the clefts of half-sunken stone, while the wind shrieked through the thorn trees and tossed the white gulls over the hills to Tir-owen, and the golden harmony of the monks could be heard stealing down the slopes and over the waters.

Perished, alas, is all that volume of sound; but the chants of nature are left, for the little waves have never ceased rippling under the shores and singing songs of the fairies who had bathed in the lough long before the rocks were grey or the world grown old.

On every side of the island lay the watery fields, winding themselves into inlets

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and across bays. Great sheets of water, unbroken save by a group of smaller islands that rode like ships that had run to seed and blossom in tropical seas, with the pine-masts budding over the green decks.

'Mid these islands of southern sea lay the grim little rock of the Purgatory, without fruit or leaf. Two grey stoned chapels, surrounded by a few poor thatched cottages, marked the spot of the famous prison-house.

A mile down the lough lay Saint's Island, rising out of the water like the ridge of a sunken mill-stone.

The purple girdle of many mountains enclosed lough and islands, and they have changed least. Their rough surface has not given an inch to a thousand years of storm. Then, as ever, the thick heath grew from their crown to the water's edge. Beautiful unburnt heather — purple and red and white.

In such surroundings the happy canons could follow out a rule of toil and contem-

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plation to their heart's content. There was endless work to be done in the garden. There were vegetables as well as flowers to be sown and tended. There were merry brown fish to be caught in the lake for days of *fast and abstinence*. There was the stone flag-way from the island to the little harbour opposite to be built and repaired, which lies under the water to this day. Rough weather and winter found them behind their walls — the garden of the soul had also to be tilled.

At certain times of the year they were taken away from their customary habits to receive and tend the pilgrims who came, by couples or by companies, to do their penance. They were men of very varied speech and custom. Some came with a great show of humility, robed in sackcloth and their feet bare as though to tread lightly in the garden of God. Others there were who came in no little state, with equipage and soldiery, with bright silks on their gentlemen, and letters in their hands from the King of England bid-

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ding all whom it concerned in Church or State do honour to the King's friends and escort them on their way. But by the magnificence they brought with them they thought to do honour to God. The minds of men were seldom in agreement, whether in their manner of sport of warfare or in their mode of serving God. Some would lay their riches and others their poverty before Him. And Holy Church hath been always ready to accept either when given freely, for she looketh to the heart and not to any show of pomp or penance.

So it came that the mountains at Derg were sometimes gay with the march of knights and sometimes sad with bare-robed penitents. Many left offerings of great value on the monks' board, sufficient for the perfecting of the chapel and the casting of the bells. This was the commencement of the treasure of Lough Derg that is often spoken of, but another treasure they possessed as well.

Every sunrise of the year their bell rang

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out for Prime, and every hour of the day was divided between prayers and works. At the third hour they sang Terce, and at the sixth Sext, and with the ninth None. Vespers filled eventide, and with Compline they turned to rest. At midnight they rose once more to sing Lauds and Matins. In the radiant dawn they moved to the splendour of Mass. These offices were ranged across the veil of their lives, like the seven lamps that glowed over the altar of God, dividing and compelling the prayer and work that, but for some clear regularity, had passed into an idle dream.

Years of practice had ordered their notes and perfected the melody of their chant. As pilgrims crossed the waters on a calm evening they heard the songs of Sion overhead. Stronger than the clouds of incense that melted into the breeze the clear chanting lived on the wind till it reached the shore. Joy and peace were met together on earth; ecstasy had bent from heaven. At times the canons would wonder at their own happiness. They

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had little of matters joyful, as the world counted them, still were they immeasurably content. The fierce pleasures of feasting and hunting were unknown to them.

True it was they made speed to follow a soul in peril, like the white brethren of Dominic who made such holy chase through Europe at this time.

Their feasting, likewise, was after another manner mysteriously at the board of God.

They lived under His open sky. To Him they opened every corner and every cranny of their lives. Penance they were ever ready to perform for the faults of others as well as for every little failing of their own. A word missed in the Divine Office, a thought slipped from the leashes of control, all was brought to correction, childish though it might seem. Men would smile at a gardener who made contrition that one rose had failed in a bed of thousands, or wept over one small herb that drooped in the sunlight, but in the

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life called religious no pain is ever spared. Let no man scorn those that have chosen it, for it has been said that the good part shall never be taken from the choser. They were happy in their lives and happier in their deaths, gladly watching each other pass to unending bliss. No festival in their calendar was quite as cheerful as when they sang the Requiem and laid a dead body with Father Dabheoc's bones.

While these men wandered to and fro in their flower garden, lost to the world, a flow of pilgrims kept coming and going to the Purgatory but a mile down the water. They were pilgrims out of the world, and, with few exceptions, they went back to the world. They came with minds stained with the world's hates and desires. For these they made penance awhile lest they might come suddenly to the presence of God. Many came there with sin committed up to the very day of coming. Such as these met hard shift in the cave.

Upon an ill day was sin done on the

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island of the cave itself, and was long remembered as the beginning of many sorrows to Derg. It happened in this wise. There was a certain Crusader, Ugolino, who, with his humble squire, had fought valiantly against the hateful Saladin. In time the squire, though of meaner rank, became the bosom friend of his master, but the latter was no little displeased when he learnt that his sister, Madeleine, had turned eyes of love upon him. In the bitter end their love continued, and Ugolino, rather than let his proud blood mingle with any of lowlier stock, slew his own sister. Filled with an anguish of remorse he fled out of his own country to the ends of the world. As he had won glory in the east he now turned for his penance to the west. By land and sea and fen he made his way to the islands that lay in the setting sun. Yet one followed him by every path and journey, his once faithful squire, bearing in his bosom a dagger still stained with Madeleine's blood. The chase was close and hot, though the pursued had no idea

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that any one was following his tracks. When he reached Derg the avenger was upon him, and missed slaying him at the ferry-house by but a minute's breath. Ugolino reached the holy island in safety.

That night an angry man watched from the woods, baulked of his desire.

The next day Ugolino was praying on the stone beds at sunset, crying for peace even at the price of his own blood. His prayer was strangely heard. Quick as a hawk a figure passed aside from a passing train of pilgrims and buried a dagger to the hilt in his shoulders. Then it leapt into the shadowy waters and disappeared for ever.

This was the first blood-shedding on the holy island, and it was the beginning of countless sorrow. As for Derg, the Saints in heaven could no longer bless her stony beds. The holy island was quitted by men as well. For a while the natives took their prayers to Saint's Island where the semblance of the old prison cave was built, but even this in time was closed by

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order of the Holy Father in Rome. After a while they returned to the other island, but it was only to see their shrines polluted and their sanctuary levelled, for Ireland had entered upon her long and anguished prison night.

THE STORY OF KNIGHT OWEN

NOW a very marvellous event befell the island called after the cave of Patrick, in the second century after the coming of the canons regular, which filled the minds of men with amazement and dispute. A certain knight named Owen came to the bishop desirous to do penance for his sins, and even to meet the terrors of the cave. Though there were many in those days that passed to and fro from the shore to the island, there were few found who dared descend into the prison-house, for some had never returned.

So great were the sins of Owen that he had despaired of his own salvation till a certain father of St. Dominic, who met him at Rome, gave him comfort and absolution. This old man prayed him to

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have sure confidence in the mercy of God, and soon after he himself died.

When the Bishop had heard the story of Owen's life, so terrible did it appear that he was afraid to let him go into the cave. Though he strove for long to dissuade him from his purpose, yet Owen only showed himself the more eager to accomplish the vow he had vowed. In the end the old Bishop blessed him and sent him away with letters to the Prior. The Prior was equally fearful, for he had the record by him of many who had entered the cave, and, failing in the spiritual combat, had been strangely done away with. Owen's heart proved tougher than the Prior's, and he gained leave to go on his uncertain quest. The Prior laid a fast of fifteen days upon him, and bade him pray the while to the Saviour to protect him from exceeding danger. So Owen prayed and fasted after the valiant fashion of that day, and on the fifteenth he was led into the little chapel to hear the most salutary Mass. Once more the Prior strove

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to turn him from his purpose, and again Owen withstood him for his own soul's good. When his words fell vain the Prior gave the knight the most Blessed Sacrament and bade him keep the Holy Name on his tongue, for that alone would avail him should he stand near the gates of hell. Then, at a word, the canons drew his clothes from off him, signifying that his past life was stripped away. Three white albs of their own were laid on him in reverence of the Holy Trinity, and then was he laid out as though dead to the world of sin, while two of the canons commenced to chant the Office of the Dead. Faint with his fasting Owen passed into a trance and therein heard his own dirging. The pangs of death seemed to have laid hold upon him, but in his heart he was comforted hearing the words — *libera me Domine de morte eterna*. The Prior spoke, and two canons, raising him to his feet, led him slowly to the cave-mouth. Behind followed the whole community clad in white robes, praying that

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he might not be like to them who go down into the pit. *A porta inferi erue eum.* Then the Prior threw holy water over him and took leave as though of a dying man. Owen, half resting on the arms of the monks, moved into the opened cave. The doors were closed and locked, and the shadows came over his head.

For a little while he stood upright in a horror of deep darkness, till a great weariness compelled him to lie down to rest. Forgetfulness and dreaming befell him. He seemed, in his wandering mind, to stand upright and to feel his way through the gloom. Once again the ground failed him, and he fell wildly on the stones. A cold sweat wrapped his body, for he felt sure that this was the outer pit. When he opened his eyes they were filled with a soft light that showed twelve men before him in the garb of religious. On each was marked a great cross. They were watching him kindly. One, who had the air to be their Superior, by the chain which touched his neck,

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greeted Owen, and assured him that it was God who had put so excellent a wish in his heart to visit the fields of Purgatory. Let him but keep the Holy Name on his tongue and refuse the temptations of evil spirits, and all would be well. But were he to suffer himself to turn but for a moment and look back he would come near to eternal loss. As he spoke clouds covered the speaker and his companions. Light and darkness passed before Owen's eyes in strange comminglement. At last the movement was withheld, and he saw an endless throng of faithful souls kneeling in prayer and supplication. As far as his eyes could reach stretched the wonderful company. Their bodies seem to tremble in an unseen flame like the fields that quiver in the heat of summer, and no wind blowing through them. At first they seemed to keep a fearful silence. Then there fell on Owen's ears a low and piteous cry, as it were the sweet impatience of a child in pain. Over their yearning

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desolation brooded the shadow of an infinite happiness.

Then Owen remembered how it was written of old time that men must be purged by the exceeding mercy of God before they can bear to enter His sublimity. These were the wide, all receiving fields of Purgatory, and these, like swarms of starlings crying in the misty reeds, were the children of men.

Not far from the very spot where he stood he could see his beloved friend and confessor, who had comforted him in Rome, and whom he knew not yet to be dead. He was kneeling in the hooded robe of his order, with such joy in his face that Owen would fain have crept into the shimmering light and knelt by his side. Even as his friend was speaking Owen was wrapt in darkness again, and came thence to a very fearful vision. All round him he heard the most piteous cries, and they were all the more terrible that he could not see whence they came. There fol-

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lowed a harsh sound of moving winds and of flame, and a dry wind blew into his very soul. He found himself hurried forward into a widening lake. In his dire anguish he spoke the Holy Name with his tongue. For a moment he was still again, and the crying fell away. By now his heart was utterly broken and spent. There passed little save fierce fear in his mind, and all his past life was slipping away like a dream. He cried exceedingly on the Blessed Virgin and her Son. He saw he was by the shore of the lake now, and felt himself lifted and crossing by a stone bridge, most narrow and perilous. On either side of him lay a seething mist of fire, and in the fire were living men. Behind loomed strange shapes and beings, such as lie in the nether sea. Their noise was as the moan that is everlasting. Through and over and round them wound a belt of fire, like a great worm that cannot die. Often Owen was near slipping in the red flood for very fear of heart, but he ever remembered to be saying the Holy

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Name till he reached the further shore. He was standing now on the edge of a beautiful garden, so lovely that he could stay and watch its peace for ever. The air was filled with an surpassing sweetness. Time itself seemed to be standing still. Neither was there any season, for the trees were loaded at once with mellow fruit and young leaves. How long he stood in this beatitude Owen knew not. Half a thousand years might be passing and not one leaf rustle against another.

Suddenly a very soft music sprang up in the distance, filling the quiet air with unebbing harmony. As the sounds thrilled his heart Owen saw a great company passing through a distant glade. A long procession moved over the quiet grass. They were men who had laboured and made an end of their labouring. Saints, popes and kings passed in glorious succession carrying the emblems of their rank. Behind them came the great religious orders in their robes, and after them again the great order of toilers bear-

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ing the humble emblems of their work. In the midst of these again was the white bodyguard of the King. These were they who had passed through the river of strife and plucked the reeds of martyrdom at the water's edge. With them was as a Rising Sun that departed not.

Owen fell back into a quiet and death-like sleep, where he lay till he heard the voice of the Prior calling him from the cave's mouth. "My son, my son, hast thou perished?" He strove to make reply, but the weakness of his flesh would not allow his tongue to move. Three times he lifted himself up, and each time he fell back exhausted. Weak as he was his mind was well awake, and he heard the canons talking softly to one another outside, while the Prior moved his heavy bunch of keys. Silence and darkness followed till the Prior descended with men bearing torches, and Owen knew he had returned to the land of the living.

When he had sufficiently recovered his strength he vowed to remain as a religious

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on Saint's Island for the rest of his life. So on an evening they brought him to the stone causeway leading over the water. As he passed this narrow bridge a sudden remembrance fell upon him of all he had suffered in his vision and of the troubled waters he had seen at his feet. For a moment horror had bowed him down, and he would have fallen if the Prior had not held him from behind. But once his feet had touched Saint's Island the bright joy of his dream re-echoed in his heart. Once more he seemed to move across the scented meadows into the presence of the King, who abideth in His tabernacle for ever surrounded by the witness of the dead and the praise of the living.

THE LAST OF THE CANONS

THOUGH every expiation was offered for the sacrilege that had been done on the island of Patrick, the shadows of coming disasters swallowed the smoke of sacrifice. With the passing years the unhappy soul of Ugolino was seen in the dreams of the religious as well as in the eyes of peasant folk, striving to accomplish his penance.

Time passed and the shadow stayed. Prior followed Prior from generation to generation. The lamps before the altar burned as with a glow of eternity, soft and unquenchable. The hands that lit them lay dead and forgotten, but the light burned on amid the shadow.

It was at this time that the English were spreading over Ireland, while the native chiefs watched jealously from their

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castles, too distrustful to join together. News indeed was not slow coming to the Prior, but it was hard for one cut off from the world to realise what was doing. England, it was rumoured, had thrown off the Faith. There was talk of changes in Ireland as well. The kings of the earth had gathered together and taken counsel against the Church. The seamless coat of Christ was rending. Rapine and sacrilege had come into Ireland moving men's hearts to greed and hate. Secret messages came over the hills that other abbeys were being thrown to the ground by soldiery. Anxiety furrowed the old man's face where fasting had drawn none. He thought well to keep the bad tidings to himself and let the others pray in peace. Gloom, utter gloom, weighed on the community for all their chanting. The soft red waters still lapped on the rocks and crooned to themselves. The seagulls swung over the lough, the seagulls that filled the place of doves in Celtic monasteries. The mountains slumbered. Yet

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it was not well. Men were not at their ease. It was whispered once more that a man in rough pilgrim's dress had been seen on the island, when all men knew that no boat had crossed for days.

Let us return to the old Prior sickening with fear on the other island. He had grown old in his order, and he had set his heart to die in her peace. To him the fall of the monastery was too sorrowful a thought to dwell upon. His brooding care for her was fighting bitterly with the imagination that ever drew fancies of her ruin. To his ears the cries of soldiers were already mingling in the chant of the choir. Yet the walls seemed so strong and beautiful. They were grey with centuries of prayer. As he wandered to and fro he would mumble fragments of the psalms that had lain in his head so long. *Montes in circuitu eius et Dominus in circuitu populi sui* — mountains are round about her and the Lord is about his people. The hills of Cullion and Croagh-brac might fence them, but would the

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Lord save Derg? To him Derg was as Jerusalem, *quae aedificatur ut civitas*. In the cloister speech all that befell of good or bad found expression in Holy Writ. In those days of trouble many men turned to the agony of David and the grief of Jeremias, and how much of Irish history could be read into their anguished utterances, that broken and desolate nations have always made as their own. Spain under the Moor, and France under the English, had passed through the night that only Israel's stricken prophets have spelt in words.

The time had come for Ireland to walk under the flail and be led captive and lose her melodies in the hand of the captor. By this time the Prior knew in his heart that it was all over. The monastery had lived its long life, it had blossomed like a rose in the wilderness. The time had come to lie desolate, like Sion, while its population wandered forth to a strange land.

His manner grew odd and moody.

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He left the affairs of the community to the others and sat himself crying in the garden. Here he had walked as a young man fresh from the joy of a strong novitiate. Here had he won his priesthood. Here, among the unchanging rocks and flowers, he had lived and grown old. Here, in closing years, he had reigned as Prior. Where was the end to be? He could only weep in his stupor and innocence. Meantime the noise of strife and hatred grew nearer every day.

In calmer moments he wondered where he should go with his brethren if they were turned adrift. If the harbours of God were loud with war, what would it be in the open sea? The Prior was truly unhappy, and likened himself to One in agony. He looked across the narrow strait and called it Cedron, and over to the broad mottled mountain and cried out, Golgotha! His monks were quiet and amazed, for he could not bear to tell them the half of his thought. He was content in his own mind to love them to the end,

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for he felt that the end was at hand, when they would be delivered to judgment and perhaps death.

The daily round of prayer and song continued as before. No ceremony was missed, no duty was left undone, but the monks had not yet guessed the sorrow in the Prior's blue eyes. Cheerfulness is the unwritten law of monastic life.

At last a grim day dawned showing strangers riding to the shore. They seemed to be civilians of rank, for armed soldiery went with them. The monks watched them galloping across the hills and the country folk slipping out of their way like hares. The Prior hardened his heart and lifted himself from despair. He felt it was time for him to put his house in order. The energies so long at rest in his spare frame rose to fever point. No longer did he pour out his lamentations in the shrubbery or cry Cedron to the waters. He was determined that he would spoil the spoilers. First he bade the altars of the chapel to be washed with

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water and wine. Then he had all the carved and delicate woodwork cleaned afresh. Every cell in the monastery was swept and purified, and such as had the skill laid fresh colours on the paintings on the walls. At the end he bade them bring all their treasure, all their vessels of silver and gold, to the one spot. They made a wonderful heap — chalices and bells and crucifixes and gold swords that had been left by the knights of Rhodes and Hungary.

That night, while the Office of Compline was being sung in the choir, the Prior slipped out with the two strongest in the monastery and piled all the treasure on the shore. Silently they wrapped each article in cloth and laid it in one of their largest boats. Then walking themselves in the shallows they dragged the boat off the rocks and set to rowing her to the shore. It was a heavy load, that many artificers had wrought in many lands to bring to perfection, but it had glittered for the last time in the sunshine

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of Ireland. No eye watched them at their labour, no one saw them depart into the grey night, and no one questioned them when they came back at dawn with tired limbs and hands stained with the peat.

A week after, a young man appeared running down the mountain side. Swiftly he hurried over the causeway bearing sudden tidings to the Prior. He had run over the beaten mountain path from Don-egal. Soldiers, it appeared, had been overheard in their cups. It was known that orders had been given to march that month to destroy Derg. This time not a stone was to be left standing. On his knees he implored the Prior to flee before the face of the soldiery. The old man answered him very quietly that they were well as they were, and some beside were too old to travel. The young man who had risked his life to bring them word could only wonder at this decision. Again and again he urged him to be up before it became too late; but no, the old

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man had fallen back into his dreaming. The fierce energy that had set him burying the gold treasure at midnight was gone. It was no use now to struggle. They must meet the cloud before them as men who enter a mist on the hill-tops in the hope of a radiant valley beyond.

That evening he gathered all the brethren into the garden close. Then he set them all to pray. *Vigilate et orate* he cried to them. After a while he told them of the evil that was coming to the monastery. They must be betrayed into the hands of angry men. Already they had conquered the world. Let them be glad. No man could rob them of the fruit of their lives. He showed them how their chapel should be cast down till not a stone was left upon another, while they themselves were scattered as sheep on the mountains. The brethren wept and begged him to lead them always. He sat in silence, then he spoke in words of yet sadder mystery: "Yet a little while

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and I shall go from you, and yet a little while and I shall be with you." No one could understand his meaning. A nameless fear overshadowed them all. The Prior seemed to have passed to madness, for though it was not Easter he said: "To-morrow will I eat the Pasch with you." The next morning they had gathered round the high altar for the last time. Tears fell from the Prior's eyes. It was indeed the last Pasch.

That day the soldiery came riding in from Donegal. Their gay plumes and their armour made a fair colour on the hill-side. They moved in leisurely fashion knowing they had not to deal with men of war. They crossed over and gruffly ordered the monks to leave the island. In sad and silent procession the unhappy community passed from their home for ever. Before they were out of sight they heard the ringing noise of blows. The pillage of the holy place had begun. The stone walls were thrown

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down over the shattered woodwork. With axes and hammers they were tearing down the carved work thereof.

A band of soldiers led the brethren a little way to make their departure certain. Afar off, on the shoulders of the hill, a crowd of peasants were watching. As the noise of destruction came over the water they raised a long keen of sorrow. It was as though the dumb buildings had found a voice and the very stones were crying against the enemy.

Away in the brown peat of the hills, somewhere at the meeting of three waters, slept the golden treasure of Derg, and no man knoweth the place of sepulture even unto this day.

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